

Text, discourse, affect and things

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Document Version

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Müller, M 2013, Text, discourse, affect and things. in K Dodds, JP Sharp & M Kuus (eds), *The Ashgate research companion to critical geopolitics.*, Chapter 3, Ashgate, Farnham, pp. 49-68.
<<http://www.ashgate.com/isbn/9781409423805>>

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Chapter 3

Text, Discourse, Affect and Things

Martin Müller

Please quote this as:

Müller, M. (2013): Text, discourse, affect and things. *Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, eds. Klaus Dodds, Merje Kuus and Jo Sharp.

Introduction

Texts are at the heart of the critical geopolitics enterprise. Critical geopolitics hinges on the assumption that we can read global politics off textual evidence. More than that, it argues that texts are not mimetic but productive of the political world: texts construct geopolitics. This premise sparked most of the thrust for the engagement with the written and spoken word and the analysis of texts became the bread-and-butter business of critical geopolitics. So much so that in 2000, in a short commentary in an edited collection on geopolitical traditions, Nigel Thrift expressed apprehension of the ‘mesmerized attention to texts and images’ and the ‘interpretation of hyperbolic written and drawn rhetoric ... often read by only a few and taken in by even fewer’ (Thrift 2000: 381, 385). As a parallel agenda, Thrift outlined a path for critical geopolitics that would see it becoming more sensitive to what he called ‘the little things’ – the mundane details of life – however without jettisoning the concern with language and text.

The present contribution charts the engagement with text and discourse in critical geopolitics. It starts from the staple of textual analysis, tracing the outlines of existing bodies of work in formal, practical and popular geopolitics and introducing deconstruction as a principal reading strategy. Staking out the difference between text and discourse, it reviews approaches to discourse analysis in critical geopolitics and points to a number of methodological lacunae that remain to be addressed. The final section takes up the challenge posed by Thrift and explores perspectives of integrating text with other categories (‘Texts and ...’) in considering practices, affect and things as central components of a broader notion of discourse.

Geopolitics as text

The cardinal role of texts for critical geopolitics is manifest in metaphors such as ‘writing global space’ (Ó Tuathail 1996), ‘geopolitical scripts’ (Ó Tuathail 1992), or ‘geo-graphing’ as ‘earth-writing/describing’ (Dalby 1991; Ó Tuathail 1994a).

The meaning ... of geopolitics takes place within the play that is the web of language and (con)text. As such, geopolitical discourse in global politics is understood to be the result of perpetual ‘geo-graphing’: the production and dissemination of strategic texts and maps. (Dodds and Sidaway 1994: 518)

In placing an emphasis on the construction of meaning in texts, critical geopolitics distinguishes itself from classical geopolitics. Studying location and resources as sources of political power over territory, classical geopolitics considers itself an objective science of how geography influences world politics (Dodds 2010). Phrased in the words of a classical geopolitician: ‘geography does not argue. It simply is’ (Spykman 1938: 236). It is this purported objectivity and the apologetic justification of power politics and interstate rivalry that comes with it that critical geopolitics protests. Understanding geopolitics as text opens an avenue to see global space as a malleable creation with political purpose and potentially multiple meanings. It does not just exist, set in stone, somewhere ‘out there’ for us to discover, but is a product of our own making. After all, ‘it is humans that decide how to represent things, and not the things themselves’ (Barnes and Duncan 1992: 2).

The fascination with texts as the encapsulation of geopolitics must be understood within the disciplinary trajectory of human geography and the social sciences at large. A major source of inspiration, the works of poststructuralist philosophers, generated attention to all matters linguistic in social science research in the 1980s, bringing about what is often called a ‘linguistic turn’ (Dear 1988). Seminal ideas such as Jean-François Lyotard’s claim about the end of meta-narratives (1984), Richard Rorty’s plea for a linguistic philosophy (1967), or Jacques Derrida’s provocative dictum that ‘there is nothing outside the text’ helped propel academic interest in texts. Under the impression of poststructuralist philosophy, human geography started to become more aware of the constructive effect of texts and language towards the end of the 1980s (Dear 1988). At that time, taking a critical stance towards texts-as-objects research was something of a lacuna, as Barnes and Duncan observed: ‘very little attention is paid to writing in human geography’ (1992: 1). The early concern with writing and texts in critical geopolitics can therefore be traced back to the budding interest in texts and language around the time of its birth at the end of the 1980s. And critical geopolitics was not alone. In international relations, too, viewing world politics through a textual lens had sparked attention (Campbell 1992; Der Derian and Shapiro 1989; Shapiro 1989; 1992).

The texts that construct global space and are the objects of analysis in critical geopolitics come in a multitude of forms. A broad variety of them is assembled in the *Geopolitics Reader* (Ó Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge 2006). A classic genre are the geopolitical doctrines or academic treatises of classical geopolitics. Halford Mackinder with his theory of the Eurasian heartland (Mackinder 1904; Dodds and Sidaway 2004) and Karl Haushofer and his ideology of *Lebensraum* (Wolkersdorfer 1999) are perhaps among the best-known exponents of intellectuals of statecraft. Yet, one could expand this list of *éminences grises* without effort, adding names such as that of American geographer and presidential adviser Isaiah Bowman (Ó Tuathail 1994b), American military strategist Edward Luttwak (Ó Tuathail 1996; Sparke 1998), American political scientist Samuel Huntington (Ó Tuathail 1996) or the Russian self-styled philosopher and geopolitician Aleksandr Dugin (Ingram 2001).

Another source of texts for critical geopolitics are speeches and policy documents as well as government records of various sorts, emerging from what Ó Tuathail and Dalby call ‘practical geopolitics’ (1998: 5). Dalby, for example, draws on documents by the Committee on the Present Danger to trace the construction of a Cold War narrative of security and danger in the United States (1990b). Policy documents and speeches by then US President George Bush form the basis of an analysis of the representation of the end of the Cold War in American foreign policy (Ó Tuathail 1992). Dodds reconstructs British representations of Argentina from government records and shows how they legitimise the adoption of particular foreign policies (1994). The underlying rationale is that studying official texts can tell us something about what geopolitical visions underpin political decision-making and how political leaders make sense of geopolitical events and form a coherent storyline.

Texts also afford a view of geopolitics beyond the arena of statecraft by giving access to perceptions of ordinary people, so-called ‘popular geopolitics’. In an early formative intervention, Sharp makes the case that ‘geopolitics does not simply “trickle down” from elite texts to popular ones’ (1993: 493). Rather, popular understandings are tied up in an intricate interplay with elite ones and provide the foundation on which elite texts can draw in order to assert their authority and gain acceptance. The texts of popular geopolitics comprise newspapers and magazines (Bernazzoli 2010; Sharp 2000a), cartoons (Dodds 2007), films (Dodds 2006), evangelical texts (Dittmer and Sturm 2010), comic books (Dittmer 2005), maps (Culcasi 2006), images (Strüver 2007) and so on. What becomes apparent from this list is the rather broad understanding of text as also encompassing still and motion pictures of various sorts. This falls into the broader definition of text as representation – as something that constructs meaning valued as reality (Barnes and Duncan 1992).

Critical geopolitics as textual deconstruction

Understanding geopolitics as text opens an important avenue for a *critical* geopolitics through deconstruction. Although often used as a catch-all term for challenging taken-for-granted assumptions of all sorts (Barnett 1999), deconstruction here refers to the particular practice of reading texts pioneered by Derrida. At its core, it posits that meaning-construction in texts is contingent: it represents one of many possible meanings, in other words, texts are polysemic. When critical geopolitics speaks of the textuality of geopolitics, it is referring to the multiple meanings that the term can have – meanings that are actualised in concrete contexts and with reference to other texts. From this poststructuralist perspective, a text is therefore ‘no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces’ (Derrida 1979: 84). Correspondingly, geopolitics-as-text is only one of many possibilities of representing world politics. The task of a critical geopolitics-as-deconstruction, then, is to uncover alternative meanings and provide alternative readings of geopolitical texts, so as to expose the contingency of geopolitics and challenge its knowledge claims (Ó Tuathail 1994a). In so doing, critical geopolitics, it is hoped, can mobilise its ‘emancipatory potential’ (Dalby 1991: 276) and provide alternative visions.

Derrida’s deconstruction has been a key source of inspiration for the project of critical geopolitics. Its main idea relies on the identification of binary meaning structures in texts, thus foregrounding the absences in a text and the undecidability of meaning. This aims to show how ‘text functions against its own explicit (metaphysical) assertions ... by inscribing a *systematic* “other message” behind or through what is being said’ (Derrida 1981: xiii). If, for example, a text’s primary message is ‘Russia is a strong state’, deconstruction argues that the opposite, ‘Russia is a weak state’, is an equally possible meaning that is always present within the text. Every hegemonic meaning contains within it the possibility of deconstruction. By bringing the opposite into being, by subverting and contesting the primary meaning, by showing that the opposite is also possible, the primary meaning is revealed to be arbitrary, because it relies on the exclusion of the opposite. Critique of geopolitical texts, in this sense, ‘is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest. ... Practicing criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult’ (Foucault 1988: 154–5). As a critique of Western metaphysics, deconstruction

reads back from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident or universal, in order to show that these things have their history, their reasons for being the way they are, their effects on what follows from them, and that the starting

point is not a (natural) given but a (cultural) construct, usually blind to itself.

(Derrida 1981: xv)

Echoing Derrida's concern, Albert argued that it is part of the deconstructionist enterprise to study how the continuous use of space and territory in language is not somehow natural but rather a specific way of producing objective meaning (1999). 'Territory talk' taking the form of geopolitics has become so completely naturalised in the social world that it is not recognised as contingent any more. More than that, anchoring meaning in the seeming objectivity of geographical space provides a sense of certainty, a feeling of location in a world that is otherwise characterised by recurrent change (Campbell 1996). For Dalby, geopolitics 'is about that ideological process of constructing spatial, political and cultural boundaries to demarcate the domestic space as separate from the threatening other' (1990a: 173). In their studies of US foreign policy, both Dalby and Campbell (1992), for example, demonstrate how the world was mapped into binaries and divided between 'us' and 'them', Nato and the Warsaw Pact, the USA and the Soviet Union, or in cartographic representations, blue and red. This spatial division and the concomitant creation of a threatening Other served to justify the need for security policies.

Taking apart this kind of fixation on spatial meaning through deconstruction is a key concern of critical geopolitics. Ó Tuathail envisions a displacement and reversion of the conceptual infrastructure of critical geopolitics and for that purpose develops the playful metaphor of sighting/siting/citing:

One means of doing this [reversing and displacing the conceptual infrastructure of geopolitics] is to subvert the centrality of sight by emphasizing how sight in the geopolitical tradition (just as elsewhere) is a socially sanctioned form of siting places (mapping them into pre-established conceptual landscapes) and also a socially authorized form of citing places (emplacing them within authoritative sets of discourses such as 'Orientalism' or 'development studies'. (Ó Tuathail 1994b: 330)

Highlighting the interconnection between space and meaning requires de-territorialising but, according to Albert, also re-territorialising at the same time (1999). This, of course, is the fundamental contradiction in which every form of deconstruction is caught: deconstruction can only take place through reapplying the very form of meaning-construction that is deconstructed.

Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say, without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work. (Derrida 1976: 24)

Critical geopolitics therefore is but another form of meaning construction, no more and no less valid or true than that of geopolitics. One critique of textual deconstruction in critical geopolitics is levelled at the fact that this situatedness of knowledge claims is not reflected, that critical geopolitics falls into the very trap it seeks to avoid: 'the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere' (Haraway 1991: 189). As Neil Smith states in a clear provocation, 'reduced to formulaic propositions, it is ironic that poststructuralism [in critical geopolitics] actually attempts a reformed positivism' (2000: 368). Feminist critics in particular argue that instead of contextualising the position of the academic author as the interpreting eye/I, we are often enough presented with a disembodied, seemingly objective critique from a position of superior knowledge (Sharp 2000b; Sparke 2000). If critical geopolitics recognises that there can be no one truth, no one valid knowledge, it also has to apply this insight to its own analysis and reflexively situate the researcher and her interpretations, so as to make clear the partiality and positionality of academic knowledge claims (Hyndman 2004). The researcher, then, 'is not Hermes who interprets the reasoning of the gods for the recipients of his message' (Nonhoff 2006, 246).

Textual deconstruction in critical geopolitics also has an uneasy relationship with notions of agency. A key proposition of the poststructuralist turn to textuality is that the meanings of texts escape the author's control. Texts are not wielded as a manipulative instrument of persuasion, since the inherent multiplicity of meaning undermines a single purpose. This 'death of the author' (Barthes 1977) has not been taken on board in much critical scholarship on formal and practical geopolitics (Müller 2008). Rather, many studies are characterised by the implicit or explicit assumption that the production of geopolitical texts is undertaken with certain intentions and which the researcher – almost like Hermes – needs to unravel (Reuber 2000). In particular, in its focus on how elites exercise power by depicting and representing places in certain ways to further their interests, critical geopolitics assumes the 'social inscription of global space by intellectuals of statecraft' (Ó Tuathail 1996: 61; see also Dodds and Sidaway 1994: 519). Texts then become 'political resources which can be mobilized and used to justify particular political arrangements in the world' (Dalby 1990a: 174). Such a stance of seeing texts as potentially manipulative instruments and the interpreter as the critical decoder sits somewhat uneasily with the general poststructuralist thrust of the field.

Text and discourse: marking the difference

Besides 'text', 'discourse' acts as a conceptual linchpin in critical geopolitics analysis. Perhaps the most obvious distinction between the two concepts is that discourse connects texts to politics. It says something about the social effects of texts and therefore is always more than text (see 'Texts and ...' below). For Foucault, who is the main reference for the concept of discourse, discourses establish truth regimes. They define what can count as true, what remains hidden and what can be seen. Discourses

encircle the field of the speakable and determine who can speak and, as a consequence, who has authority. At the same time, discourses produce publics, audiences who identify with one or the other discourse. What results by implication is a disqualification and marginalisation of other modes of categorising and making sense of the world (Milliken 1999). In short, discourses do not just describe, but ‘systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault 1972 [1969]: 49). They set the rules of the game, as it were.

The foundational premise of critical geopolitics is the contention that discourse has power: it is productive of space and therefore bound up with questions of politics and ideology (Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992). Place writing becomes place righting (Ó Tuathail 1994a). Critical geopolitics takes its inspiration from Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), which could be justly regarded as the first work of critical geopolitics. In it, Said examines how the Western discourse of Orientalism produced and managed the Orient, constructing it as exotic and inferior. Gregory, picking up on this argument, considers the appropriation of Egypt through detailed descriptions and en-visionings of scholars, explorers, the military and so on that create maps of meaning through which territories become knowable and therefore governable (1995). Spaces are mapped, surveyed, compartmentalised and governed on the basis of maps, explorers’ descriptions, academic accounts or travel writing. This tradition of producing regional geographies results in elaborate spatial accountancies ‘a tallying up of the world’s regions, an individualizing of them according to classificatory systems of climate, degrees of freedom, inventories of resources and hierarchies of race’ (Ó Tuathail 1994a: 537). Discourse therefore makes space knowable and meaning-full.

Geopolitical discourse has a disciplining effect in that it demarcates what counts as the right and therefore valid knowledge on the spatial aspects of global politics. Foucault coined the concept of power/knowledge, which in its French original as *pouvoir/savoir* expresses aptly the connotation of *pouvoir* as ‘being able to do something’/‘power’ and *savoir* as ‘knowing how to do something’/‘knowledge’, since both are infinitive verbs and nouns at the same time. Unravelling the power/knowledge nexus is seen as one of the main tasks of critical geopolitics. This becomes possible because no discourse is ever able to completely structure the social. It is always dependent on an Other, a threat, that needs to be excluded in order to stabilise the discourse. While this threat is the condition of possibility of a hegemonic discourse, it also is its condition of impossibility at the same time, since it harbours the potential to disrupt it (Laclau 1990). The power of discourse to structure global politics is therefore precarious, opening the possibility for new, different articulations.

Doing discourse research

In critical geopolitics, the concept of discourse has found ubiquitous application in a wide range of studies. Examples include the rhetorical production of marginality and Otherness through geopolitical discourses (e.g. Kuus 2004), the constitutive and disciplining power of geopolitical discourses as truth regimes (e.g. Gilbert 2005; Ó Tuathail 1996), the gendering of geopolitics (e.g. Dalby 1994), the formation of geopolitical identities and subjects (e.g. Müller 2011; Newman 2000) as well as geopolitical imaginaries (G. Smith 1999) or the constitution of geographical knowledge and its political implications (e.g. Häkli 1998).

Yet, beyond the basic set of assumptions outlined in the previous section, what exactly is meant by discourse and what literature authors refer to varies tremendously (Müller 2010; Ó Tuathail 2002). At a general level, discourse research in critical geopolitics can be classified along three axes as in Figure 3.1: context, analytic form and political stance. Traditionally, critical geopolitics has combined a position of *distance* with an *interpretive–explanatory* framework and a *critical* stance of analysis. *Distance* here means that it has tended to target the grand, global questions of world politics such as war and peace, security, power politics and so on. It understands discourses as embedded in the gamut of historical experiences, geopolitical traditions, national identities, state institutions and networks of power (Ó Tuathail 2004). In this, critical geopolitics echoes Foucault’s concern with the genealogies of discourse and its interaction with society (e.g. Foucault 1973). The field has seen less immersion, by contrast, in specific contexts – close-up, detailed studies of the workings of discourse in a limited setting.

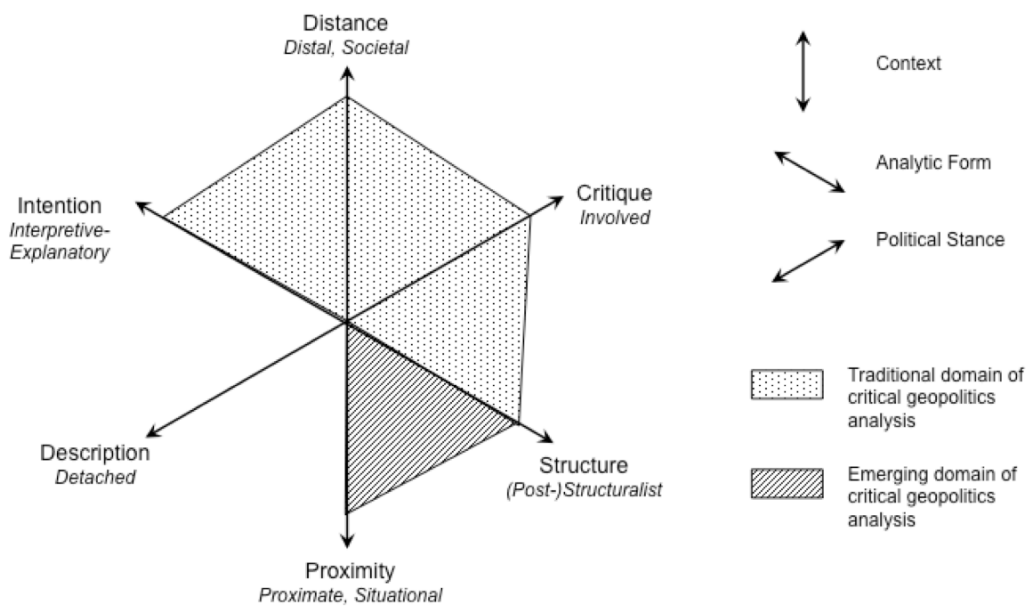


Figure 3.1 The three core dimensions of the concept of discourse and its use in critical geopolitics (adapted from Müller 2010)

In most cases, the analysis of discourse also adopts an interpretive–explanatory position, which is the mainstay of qualitative text analysis. Interpretive–explanatory research tries ‘to reconstruct the tacit rules, the shared experience and the collective knowledge of social actors’ (Angermüller 2005: 4). It acknowledges discourses as super-subjective structures which both enable and constrain human agency but in its analysis often tends to be concerned with the agency of individuals in meaning creation, ‘telling the right kind of stories to the right audiences at the right moment’ (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000: 1132). Such an understanding of discourse is evident in the conceptualisation of discourse as ‘sets of capabilities people have ... sets of socio-cultural resources used by people in the construction of meaning about their world and their activities’ (Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992: 192–3). Within this perspective, a critical stance implies that the critical geopolitics scholar is not an innocent bystander, describing the properties of a discourse, but an active contributor to challenging the commonsense understandings and ideologies of hegemonic discourses. This resonates with Van Dijk’s appeal to critical discourse analysts, who should be

primarily interested and motivated by pressing social issues, which [they hope] to better understand through discourse analysis. ... Their hope ... is change through critical understanding. ... Their critical targets are the power elites that enact, sustain, legitimate, condone or ignore social inequality and injustice. ... Their critique of discourse implies a political critique of those responsible for its perversion in the reproduction of dominance and inequality.
(Van Dijk 1993: 252–3)

Instead of adopting an interpretive–explanatory stance, discourse research in critical geopolitics can also be concerned with structural properties of a text. In fact, Van Dijk argues that ‘attention to “structure”, “form”, “organization”, “order”, or “patterns”, is characteristic of virtually all contemporary approaches to discourse. ... In other words, all comments on fragments of text/talk should be framed in terms of theoretically based categories of structure’ (van Dijk 2011). More than reconstructing and comprehending meaning, a structural understanding of discourse concentrates on the systematic features of the material to be analysed – it identifies recurring patterns and regularities in discourses. Such systematic features may include hegemonic and antagonistic relationships, dislocations and their filling, contradictions and ambiguities, shifts and breaks. Such a perspective recognises that discourse presents a corpus of statements whose organisation is systematic and subject to certain regularities (Foucault 1972

[1969]). Critique here also takes a somewhat different tack from Van Dijk's vision of the engaged critic above. It is about laying bare the contingencies of discourse and examining its conditions of possibility and social effects.

Discursive methodologies

One crucial silence in discourse research in critical geopolitics concerns the question of methodology. Discourse analyses which spell out their conceptual and methodological foundations and are transparent about the process of constructing a methodology are still comparatively rare. This lacuna is all the more surprising, since discourse analysis does not have a shared, established methodology as in the case of content analysis, for example. There is, therefore, considerable potential for methodological sharpening and differentiation and 'discussion of how to formally undertake a discourse analysis of geopolitical reasoning and foreign policy practice is long overdue' (Ó Tuathail 2002: 606). To be sure, it would be counter-productive to elaborate one methodology for discourse analysis in critical geopolitics, for such a universal recipe does not exist and should not be developed (Torring 1999: 292). Every discourse analysis needs to be tailored to both the empirical material and the theoretical assumptions underpinning the research project:

Method is not synonymous with a free-standing and neutral set of rules and techniques that can be applied mechanically to all empirical objects. Instead, while discourse theorists ought to reflect upon and theorize the ways they conduct research, these questions are always understood within a wider set of ontological and epistemological postulates, and in relation to particular problems. (Howarth 2004: 317)

Yet, being clear about our conceptual foundations and translating them into a methodological framework can only add to analytical rigour and precision. More than that, it helps us contribute to general theory-building and the refinement of methodologies of discourse analysis.

Having an explicit and rigorous methodological framework also helps steer clear of some of the key problems that Antaki et al. pinpoint in the analysis of discourse (2003). Of particular relevance are three of them, each of which can be found in one or the other piece of writing in critical geopolitics. First, *under-analysis through summary* cautions against merely providing a résumé of the content of a text. Providing summaries necessarily simplifies, often smoothes over inconsistencies and draws attention to some elements of the text while ignoring others. At worst, it risks distorting the object of analysis if beliefs, policies, political orientations and so on are imputed. Second, *under-analysis through taking sides*

has the analyst positioning herself vis-à-vis the data by expressing support or disapproval of a certain text. This is not to say that the critical geopolitics scholar should remain neutral towards discourses of warmongering, marginalisation and so on, but rather that these discourses need to be analysed for the systematic regularities they exhibit. Discourse analysis therefore cannot only be a critical manifesto that sides with the disenfranchised for critique's sake, but needs to demonstrate how effects of exclusion or closure are achieved. Third, *under-analysis through spotting features* sees the analyst pointing out details of the text without analysing how they contribute to the overall discourse. For example, pointing out that a text contains a spatial metaphor is not enough to qualify as analysis. It would have to be examined what this spatial metaphor does, how it is used and what it is used for.

A number of general works provide useful overviews of rather different understandings of discourse analysis that can serve as starting point for a more sustained discussion of methodologies of discourse analysis (Phillips and Hardy 2002). The studies of Ó Tuathail and Glasze present two rather different approaches to employing discourse analysis in critical geopolitics. Ó Tuathail presents a framework for narrative analysis of practical geopolitical reasoning that focuses on the 'grammar of geopolitics' (2002). Drawing our attention to the role of analogies and metaphors for categorising geopolitical events, he conceives of geopolitics as a theatrical drama in which statespersons act out roles and have to piece together a credible storyline and performance in front of an audience. The analysis of the building blocks of such a storyline, according to Ó Tuathail, should examine location specifications, situation descriptions and protagonist typologies of a storyline as well as the imputations of causality or blame strategies contained within them. It also needs to attend to interest enunciations, that is the strategic significance assigned to the events in the storyline. Glasze, on the other hand, combines methods from corpus linguistics and narratology to analyse large digital-text corpora that cover several decades (2007). He draws on a quantitative technique to chart the relations between lexical elements and thus isolate the regularity of relations between signifiers and trace the frequency and co-occurrence of signifiers across time. Because this quantitative technique does not allow the capture of the meaning of texts, he supplements it with narrative analysis of selected text extracts. Though rather different, both studies present equally valid approaches to discourse analysis that build a methodology for analysis that fits the empirical material and the conceptual framework.

Texts and ...

While concerns about specifying an adequate methodology address the problem of how to analyse texts and discourse, critical geopolitics has experienced a recent push to supplement the textual focus that has been its hallmark for most of its existence. This can partly be seen as a response to ethnographic and

feminist strands of research challenging discourse studies for erasing people's everyday experiences and taking a distant, sometimes even ironic stance towards geopolitics (Megoran 2006). Critical geopolitics has been taken to task for representing a 'disembodied critical practice' (Hyndman 2004: 310) that failed to situate both the researcher and research subjects. In much the same vein, Nigel Thrift urged the sub-field to become more attuned to what he calls 'the little things': '“mundane” objects like files, “mundane” people like clerks and “mundane” words like “the” – which are crucial to how the geopolitical is translated into being' (Thrift 2000: 380). This concern is reminiscent of Nietzsche's observation in *Ecce Homo* that in the preoccupation with grand concepts 'all questions of politics, the ordering of society, education have been falsified down to their foundations ... because contempt has been taught for the “little” things, which is to say for the fundamental affairs of life' (Nietzsche 2006: 28). Shifting attention to these little things does not mean abandoning the analysis of texts altogether, but rather to supplement textual analysis with a number of other aspects of the social.

... practices

One prospective avenue is to develop a heightened sensitivity to how texts and discourses are bound up with social practices. Attention to practices, in particular everyday practices, has been founding wanting in critical geopolitics for some time (Dodds 2001; Dowler and Sharp 2001; Megoran 2006; Paasi 2000). Recently, however, the contours of an approach that is more concerned with *proximate* contexts and people's experiences have started to emerge (see the dotted area in Figure 3.1), in contradistinction to what is sometimes called 'geopolitical remote-sensing' (Paasi 2000: 283) based on representations. In fact, a closer reading of poststructuralist authors such as Laclau and Mouffe suggests that the concept of discourse should reach beyond text and 'pierce the entire material density of the multifarious institutions, rituals and practices' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 109). Foucault, too, examines the power of discourse as embedded in institutions such as the hospital or the prison and insists that a reduction of discourse to text is not permissible (Foucault 1972 [1969]: 49).

Discourses in this broader sense encompass social practices and call for an agenda that combines the analysis of texts and practices (Müller 2008; Thrift 2000). With its concern with the subjects of geopolitics, feminist geopolitics in particular advocates a perspective that examines how 'discourses actually work in everyday life and how they make subjects of people: how they are articulated and performed in different contexts to make subjects of their identities and geopolitical visions' (Dowler and Sharp 2001: 174). Becoming attuned to everyday practices does not have to mean surrendering the occupation with high politics and the 'big' questions of geopolitics. On the contrary, exploring the practices that underpin meaning-making in high politics can add much to textual studies by placing policy professionals and intellectuals of statecraft in their social contexts (Kuus 2010; 2011). Inevitably, such an

approach calls for methodologies that are able to adequately capture social practices. Ethnography holds particular potential here, but also raises a number of issues around research ethics, access and data representation (Megoran 2006).

... *affect*

A second path to expand and perhaps strengthen textual studies of discourse could lead critical geopolitics towards taking affect more seriously – a direction that has become increasingly popular in human geography with the spread of non-representational theory (Pile 2010). This would take the cue from initial explorations of the importance of affect for a critical geopolitics (e.g. Carter and McCormack 2006; Ó Tuathail 2003; Pain and Smith 2008) and ask how pre-cognitive, libidinal ‘gut-feelings’ interfere and interact with geopolitical representations. Once again, such a move would not mean jettisoning text and defecting to affect but exploring the ways in which hegemonic meaning-making is always imbued with affective investment. Engaging with affect could help us make serious headway in explaining the grip of discourse: why do subjects sometimes desire to identify with a discourse, to be subjected, even though they might realise the contingency of discourse? The answer, Alcorn suggests, is that ‘some modes of discourse, because they are libidinally invested, repeatedly and predictably function to constitute the subject’s sense of identity’ (2002: 17).

Bringing together affect and discourse could open more-than-symbolic ways of understanding why certain geopolitical discourses become hegemonic, while others do not. If we follow the argument of psychoanalysis, discourses are able to assert their hegemony because they promise enjoyment to subjects. Consider this statement by Žižek on nationalism as a hegemonic discourse:

To emphasize in a ‘deconstructionist’ mode that Nation is not a biological or transhistorical fact but a contingent discursive construction, an overdetermined result of textual practices, is thus misleading: such an emphasis overlooks the remainder of some real, nondiscursive kernel of enjoyment which must be present for the Nation qua discursive-entity effect to achieve its ontological consistency. (Žižek 1993: 202)

The absence of this enjoyment is why, according to Stavrakakis, the project of constructing a coherent European identity has foundered: Europe has not been capable of winning ‘“the hearts” and the “guts” of the peoples of Europe’ (2007: 226). American patriotism, by contrast, is alive and kicking, not least because it is linked to the enjoyment of consumerism: watching baseball matches, eating hot dogs, driving SUVs and so on (Kingsbury 2008). Exploring the affective underpinnings of geopolitical discourse – whether it is aggression, consumerism, the sexual libido, fear or others – therefore could tell us much about the social effectiveness of discourse that an exclusively symbolic approach would miss.

... *things*

A final promising way forward would encourage us to intertwine meaning and materiality, texts and things. On a rather basic level, such an approach could start from the recognition that texts are material. In order to exist they need to be inscribed into or onto something: paper, a banner, a hard drive or any other carrier medium. In this physical form, texts can circulate easily: books can be printed millions of times, electronic files can be easily copied and distributed. Their material inscription turns texts into immutable mobiles: things that can easily travel from one place to the other and do not suffer any physical mutation through the distance travelled (Latour 1987). As they travel, texts become actors in their own right, circulating between people and places and in the process of circulation extending the geopolitical network, enrolling new actants (Barnes 2002). One promising avenue for critical geopolitics therefore would involve following the paper trail and tracing the lives and paths of texts such as new geopolitical doctrines, images of war or maps of migration flows as they circulate among politicians, experts and news media and establish relationships.

Going one step further, such a stance could recognise that discourses are not merely symbolic but socio-material entities: geo-power depends not only on texts but on mobilising things and making them work on one's behalf. Foucault made this argument in a number of his analyses, for example when he considers in *Discipline and Punish* how power emerges from enclosing, partitioning and monitoring individuals and how the architecture of the Panopticon provides the material form conducive to this (1979). Actor-network theory has taken up this point, arguing that power arises from relating humans and things in a network (Latour 2005). Consider Law's account of the building of the Portuguese sea empire in the sixteenth century (1986; see also Kendall 2004). He argues that three elements were crucial for establishing safe naval routes and enabling long-distance control: devices, documents and drilled people – or things, texts and humans. A crucial device was the quadrant, an instrument that allowed the calculation of latitude from the declination of the sun or a star. The quadrant alone would have been useless, however, had it not been for the tables and maps which allowed the measurements to be translated into meaningful coordinates for navigation. This translation, in turn, became possible only through adequately trained and drilled navigators and sailors who knew how to operate such instruments and how to work the ship.

While techniques of control in modern empires might be more complex, Law makes a convincing argument that instead of assuming that texts are powerful *eo ipso*, we need to re-assemble discourses from the bottom up and examine how they gain their power from weaving a far-flung socio-material network of texts, people and things. The radical impetus of critical geopolitics would then not focus on disrupting the meaning of texts as such, but on picking apart the infrastructure, as it were, that upholds

and disseminates this meaning, providing the foundation for the power of subjectivation. What are the socio-material underpinnings that allow certain geopolitical images to become powerful while others do not? Through what arrangements do particular texts circulate more easily than others and establish alliances? Through what materials are networks made durable and hold together? In tracing such movements and the forging of associations, actor-network theory demands critical proximity. But a critical geopolitics that tries to live up to a more emancipatory agenda of affecting change might want to go one step further and consider what Paul Routledge termed 'critical engagement' (2008: 201): tracing the network, but at the same time acting inside it to create a different geopolitics (Koopman 2011).

Conclusion

Critical geopolitics emerged from the assumption that texts and discourses can tell us something about the social construction of world politics. The analysis of texts thus is the bread and butter of the field and is still going strong after more than 20 years. Having started from a deconstruction of geopolitical accounts of intellectuals of statecraft, the texts of critical geopolitics have branched out to encompass popular constructions of world politics, ranging from cartoons to films and comic books. This development sometimes makes it difficult to draw the line between what is still (critical) geopolitics and what is a critical interrogation of the relationship between power and territory, but perhaps not critical geopolitics. Despite this welcome broadening of perspective, the core business of engaging with texts produced in the realms of formal and practical geopolitics will remain a cornerstone of critical geopolitics: 'if critical geopolitics loses sight of classical geopolitics, or if it becomes disinterested in, say, military geostrategies, or the latest speech by Dick Cheney, then it risks becoming an academic fad' (MacDonald 2010: 318).

To maintain the vigour of critical geopolitics for the next 20 years, however, the analysis of texts requires strengthening. This contribution has argued that linking the analysis of text with methodologies of discourse analysis is an important step to construct a transparent, coherent and systematic analysis that avoids the pitfalls of selective reading and under-analysis through merely providing a summary, taking sides or spotting features (Antaki et al. 2003). But taking texts seriously also means embedding them in 'con-text', and not understanding them as isolated, free-floating containers that somehow, somewhere have an impact. Texts impinge on the political and social world because of their entanglement with social practices, affect or material objects. If we want to understand, critique and challenge the power of texts to shape world politics and geopolitical subjectivities, our analysis must be attentive to the linguistic

dimension of discourse, but reach beyond it at the same time. This does not mean abandoning the analysis of texts, but rather recognising that texts are

merely a small cog in an extra-textual practice. It is not a question of commenting on the text ... it is a question of seeing what use it has in the extra-textual practice that prolongs the text. (Deleuze 1973: 186–7; trans. in D.W. Smith 1998: xvi).

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